The Oxford Movement Centennial
1833 - 1933
in the Diocese of Pennsylvania

✠

Sermon Preached

at

S. Luke's Church, Germantown

by the Rector

on the Second Sunday After Easter

April 30, 1933

TEXT: Ephesians 1—Parts of Verses 22 and 23

"The Church . . . which is His Body"

Throughout our Diocese today, we hold in honor that large company of men and women who inspired and shared in the great movement that we have come to know as the Oxford Movement, which, by historians, is regarded as receiving its definite start from a sermon preached by John Keble in the University Church at Oxford in 1833. Our American part in the Movement really began more than twenty years earlier, with the consecration of Bishop Hobart to the Diocese of New York,—curiously the very year of the incorporation of this Parish.

If one were to draw a picture of the life of the Church in the period about 1800, and place it side by side with that of our Parish life here today, the contrast would be staggering and almost incredible. Consider, for instance, our record of over three thousand communions from Ash Wednesday through Easter, at the Mother Church, and the combined total of approximately eight hundred communions on Easter Day alone, in the Mother Church and Chapel, with that of the observance of Easter in the great Cathedral Church of the Anglican Communion—S. Paul's in London—when, on Easter Day, 1810, there were three communions! In those days there were Bishops who rarely visited their dioceses, such as one Bishop of a Welsh Diocese, who lived at the English Lakes and saw his diocese but once. Bishops there were who rarely confirmed. Our own Bishop White—first Bishop of Penn-

sylvania—is said never to have been confirmed himself, and often only visited six parishes a year, and went to the parishes west of the Alleghenies for Confirmation only once in forty-nine years; and the Bishop of South Carolina never confirmed at all. Then, too, there was the terrible abuse of pluralism, when one clergyman held the income from several livings. We are told that, in 1791, there were more than eleven thousand livings in England, held by slightly more than four thousand incumbents. These were the days when rectors might be rarely seen and often unknown by their parishioners, who were cared for by the curate, often as infrequently as once a month. No Convention of the American Church was held from 1806 to 1812, and then only thirteen delegates attended, and the Convention adjourned with no expectation of ever meeting again.

With all our present-day defects and imperfections,—compared with conditions such as these of a century or more ago, we seem almost perfection itself. Dr. Arnold was not alone in thinking that "the Church, as it now stands, no human power can save". Surely then, the Movement which has brought such abundant blessings to the whole Church, must be of God.

It would be very easy for us to make a long list of the achievements of the Oxford revival, but it is necessary to be brief. To many, the first thing would be the increase and enrichment of the Church's services and the consequent care of the churches and the use of art and music to adorn them. Others would emphasize the re-establishment of discipline, in the observance of the fasts of the Church, the use of the sacrament of Penance, and the revival of the monastic life. Even the discipline in the ordinary communicant's life, which guides him to make frequent early fasting communions and observe a rule of private devotion, implies a life lived by the discipline restored to us through the Oxford Movement. Then there is the greater emphasis on social welfare in the Church, with the first great inspiring examples of priests like Fathers Mackonochie and Lauder, Staunton, Tooth and Dolling, who gave themselves to the services of the unfortunate, mostly in the slums of London. There came, too, a return of pastoral ideals to the office of the Parish Priest, who was not now desired merely to possess the powers of handsome elocution, but, following such an example as set by Keble in Hursley Village Parish, to minister to the sick, to be anxious for the welfare of his people, careful in teaching the young,—especially for Confirmation,—and considerate and kind to the aged and unfortunate.

But, behind all these achievements, there was something that was central and motivating, some clear conviction, some thought firmly held, and, by the energy of faith, made the basis of their life and action. What was this conviction? It was none other than

their idea of the Church, her true nature, her Apostolic authority in ministry and sacrament. This lay behind all they achieved; this gave purpose to their work and strength to endure persecution. All these other results were as by-products of this great conviction.

Why did they want to adorn the worship and ministry of the Church? Why impose discipline upon themselves and others? Why minister to the unfortunate and afflicted? Why? Because they believed the Church to be a living organism,—Christ's life extended on earth, through its apostolic foundation and ministry; its worship of a present living God, to be the best earth could offer; its human members disciplined to share in the Divine Life, and, because of its Catholic character, its Divine power to be fully communicated to ALL souls, no matter how unfortunate in the world's eyes, yet fully precious in His sight.

We are accustomed to say that a man is ultimately as he thinks; that, behind his words and acts, lie the thoughts that dwell in his mind; and that, fundamentally and finally, they determine his conduct,—his character. This is no less true of movements. The results of the Oxford Movement are due to a great idea, central and motivating, and *that* was their idea of the nature of the Church.

But, we keep the Centennial. We rejoice in the great achievements. Is the Movement then come to an end? Has it accomplished its purposes? What about the next one hundred years? What now is to be the hope and aim, the objective, the ideal? As many may wonderingly ask—Where are we aiming to go? As one looks about in the Church of today, and rejoices in the achievements of the past century, surely we must honestly admit there is plenty yet to be done. Consider the very things that we note as achieved by the Oxford Movement along the lines of worship, disciplined life, pastoral and social ideals. Can we say nothing more needs to be learned of these? One has only to glance at the newspapers,—at the column of religious advertisements for Sunday,—to realize that, though many have grasped the idea that they ought to do something they call "worshipping God", yet many of them have not the slightest idea of what that is, and even the best doubtless have not got beyond fourth or fifth grade.

How are *we* to achieve *our* great things, as we face another century of the Oxford Movement? Where is to be our sound basis and what our central idea energized by faith? Clearness of thought and conviction is no less a need in the muddled world of today. We start off another century with a serious re-dedication to a lofty principle, with a bold proclamation of a great fact and one which is fundamental and central to our whole religious life,—namely, that the Church IS the Church of God; that it is no merely human organization or society, no creature of man or of the state; that it is a definite, living, organism, founded, instituted, commissioned by Christ, but, more than that, deriving its

very life from Christ. Those who think that we may stress the Church too much, and Christ too little, fail to comprehend that the Church is not something separate from Christ or set, as an institution, some way apart from Him, but that it is the BODY OF CHRIST, —in a very real sense, it IS Christ, for the Church on earth is the extension of His Incarnate Life. It is here to do what He did when on earth, not to do it apart from Him, or instead of Him, but really it is He still doing it, now through and in His extended body. This is why we come to worship. This is why we would submit ourselves to His priestly discipline. This is why we would share in His work. For the Church's true worship is to present, ever and anew, His Self-offering. She knows no other worship, and her godly discipline is the way we may unite ourselves to this, His offering, and share His life and His grace. Just as it is Christ's priesthood, in the Church's priests, that consecrates, that absolves and blesses, so it is Christ who gives the Church all her life and power. We have no worship, no priesthood, no life, but His!

This was the great conviction that possessed the hearts of the Oxford leaders. *This* was the secret of their power, and we can do no better thing in their honor than to dedicate ourselves more fully than ever before to hold and to teach, by word and example, this great truth of our belief in One Catholic and Apostolic Church—"The Church . . . which is His Body".